The Fourth Church Pulpit

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

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John M. Buchanan

FOURTH
PRESBY
TERIAN
CHURCH
A LIGHT IN THE CITY

126 East Chestnut St. Chicago, IL 60611-2094
Phone: 312.787.4570
John M. Buchanan, Pastor

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6, Zephaniah 3:14-20

"I will remove disaster from you ... I will bring you home."
Zephaniah 3:18, 20 (NRSV)

I was on duty in a side aisle during our sanctuary open house last Saturday morning, greeting visitors when I met Jimmy MacLennan. His wonderful brogue indicated that he was a Scotsman and we began immediately a lively and animated conversation. "Where are you from?" I asked. It's the way we Americans put the question and his answer reminded me of the lovely way the Scots think and speak about the topic. "I'm staying in Glasgow. I've been staying there for thirty years. I belong to Skye" ... I'm staying in Glasgow — that is where I live. I belong to Skye. Skye is home. Even though he hasn't lived there for three decades, Skye is where he belongs. That's what home is: where you belong.

The experience of remembering home is almost without exception, powerful. It can be sweet, it can also be painful. It is almost always personally important. I'll never forget the first time I was asked to do it in a structured way. It was a seminar for pastors. The leader was Reuel Howe, a very distinguished theologian and Episcopal priest who was one of the pioneers in the whole spiritual formation and development movement. He passed out big pieces of newsprint and crayons and told us to draw the floor plan of the earliest house we could remember — our original home in detail. I started to get nervous. I never could color between the lines, my stick figures look infantile, my grandchildren draw better trees and flowers than I do. Besides when someone suggests that self-revelation might be a good idea, I look for the door. On top of everything, I hadn't lived in that home for 20 years. But I couldn't get out gracefully. I was stuck. So, I took the paper and crayons and started in and was astonished. I could remember everything: each item of furniture, the kitchen table and cabinets, the sink where I dried dishes on occasion. The place where Dad deposited his work case and the table where Mother did crossword puzzles while she drank coffee. I remembered — and drew — the large Philco radio, the over-stuffed chairs and carpet with strange dark scenes from Persia, I suppose, complete with peacocks, and the smells came flooding back: pot roast and Thanksgiving turkey, and wet wool mittens and the radiators when the heat came on. I amazed myself with how much of that home I remembered and how very close to the surface those memories actually were.

My guess is that the same would be true for you and that some of you may already have left us temporarily and, if I've set this up right, are right now remembering the way the living room looked, the feel of fabric on the couch, the smell of dinner, the sound of voices.

The fact is there is probably no more important or powerful idea than the idea of home, our original home or wherever or whatever has become home for us now, a place where we belong.

And come Christmas and along with everything else that happened to us — emotionally, spiritually, socially, and financially, in some way each of us thinks about home, the home we had, or wish we had, and in some way each of us goes home.

Garrison Keillor titled one of his collections of essays — *Leaving Home* — actually they are edited versions of "Prairie Home Companion" monologues — *The News From Lake Wobegon.* One of them is about going home for Christmas. Keillor calls it "Exiles."

Corrine Ingqvist came home to Lake Wobegon from Minneapolis where she teaches school, in her red VW, with 132 essays to correct. But instead of reading and correcting, she bakes cookies and currant buns.

> "Amazing: a delicious smell from childhood that brings back every sweet old aunt and grandma as if they're there beside you.
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> "Over at Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility, mass is full of exiles, lapsed Catholics who are too busy or indolent for church but come for Christmas to hear the music, see the candles, smell the incense and feel hopeful.
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> "Dozens of exiles are back, including some whom their families weren't expecting because they said they weren't coming, couldn't come, were sorry, but it was just out of the question. But Christmas exerts powerful forces. We turn a corner in a wretched shopping mall and a few bars of a tune turn a switch in our heads and gates open and tons of water thunder through Hoover Dam, the big turbines spin, electricity flows and we get in our car and go back, like Salmon." [p. 181-182]